



## Being Processed Lesson Plan

**Program Overview:** For many immigrants planning to settle in the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Ellis Island represented a site where their physical and emotional will were tested. Unfamiliar with their surroundings and the dominant language, these newly-arrived passengers would soon run through a gauntlet of tests to prove themselves “fit” to enter the country. This on-site activity aims to replicate the immigrant experience for students at Ellis Island.

**Time Frame:** 45-50 minutes

**Materials:**

- Two immigrant cases studies (Each student should have one case study)
- Pen and paper
- Manila folder (optional)

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe some of the difficulties immigrants encountered while being processed at Ellis Island.
- Evaluate the social resources available to newly-arrived passengers while at the Main Building
- Formulate theories on where immigrants can seek assistance at Ellis Island compared to the immigrants of today.

**Procedure:**

1. **Motivation-** Upon arriving to Ellis Island, ask students to recall their first-day at middle-school/high school. What were some of their feelings/apprehensions when they arrived in their new school? Have the class remember registering for classes that first week. Be ready for students to share their hopes/anxieties with the class. Inform the class that many newly-arrived immigrants share many of these worries when they apply for entry to this country. (This can be done on the front steps of the main building).
2. With the mood established, inform students that they will each be given a “character file” of an immigrant processed at Ellis Island roughly a century ago. (Each file will contain a profile of the immigrant, and depending on the case, chalk marks, questionnaire and supporting documents to enter the country. Adding a manila folder to the case study will add a more authentic feel.) Invite each student to look at their file and assume the mindset of immigrants enduring the rigors of being examined. **Reinforce the difficulties endured by immigrants in steerage class. Stress the challenges of entering a new country (and waiting to be processed) in a place where you do not speak the**

**dominant language. (i.e.: How would you communicate with others? Who could you turn to for help?)** *Note: Once folders have been distributed, have chaperones stationed at each of the exhibits on the second floor.*

3. The file carefully read, students will begin the journey of their immigrant case study. Depending on the immigration file, students will follow a traditional path: start at the baggage room, proceed up to the Great Hall on the second floor, head to the gallery *Through America's Gate*, and end either at the Graffiti Walls on the third floor or *Peak Immigration Years* on the second. NOTE: Although the group will be supplied with clear directions, the trick for the educator will be to monitor the space to ensure that students are on task. Inform students to meet a designated area once they are finished with their immigrant journey.
4. Assessment Evidence: Following the activity, invite students to have an open-ended discussion in the Great Hall or any open space outside. Ask the group for their impressions of the site and of their immigrant case studies. While facilitating the conversation, consider asking the students the following questions:
  - How do the different approaches in processing reflect the concerns residents in the United States had at that time?
  - In what ways did immigrant-aid societies assist immigrants in getting settled in the United States?
  - If you were a high-ranking government official, would you approve of the ways in which immigrants were being processed?
5. With time permitting, relate the conversation to immigration today, facilitating a discussion to include more of a current focus. Consider including some or all of the questions listed below:
  - Where do you think immigrants can turn to for help today? Do you think these resources are sufficient?
  - Do you think immigrants today have an easier or harder time settling in the United States? Why?
  - What challenges do immigrants face in your local community today?
  - What are the main resources immigrants rely on today?
6. Homework Choose **ONE** of the following assignments (optional):
  - A. Each student in class will compose a one-to-two paragraph summary describing their experience at Ellis Island. Each student will assess the importance of social resources and networks for immigrants, past and present, as they settle in the United States. Further, students will research potential social services or institutions that assist immigrants in their communities today, and determine whether these services are adequate. Students are expected to consider both sides of the issue before making a decision.
  - B. Students will write a one-to-two paragraph statement about being processed as their immigrant case-study at Ellis Island. Each student will detail the different procedures administered to immigrants, and determine whether which process was necessary.
  - C. Students will research the current criteria immigrants have to undergo today and contrast the contemporary to the Ellis Island process to the level of difficulties for the immigrant. Responses should be evaluated on how evenly both sides are considered.